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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, March 2, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BEAN BUYS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Be it ever so humble, there's no bargain in vegetables quite like the bean. Dried beans are always winter food bargains. But this year they promise to be unusually good buys because the fall crop was so large. According to the last report I have, the country's supply of dried beans is a fifth larger than it was last year.

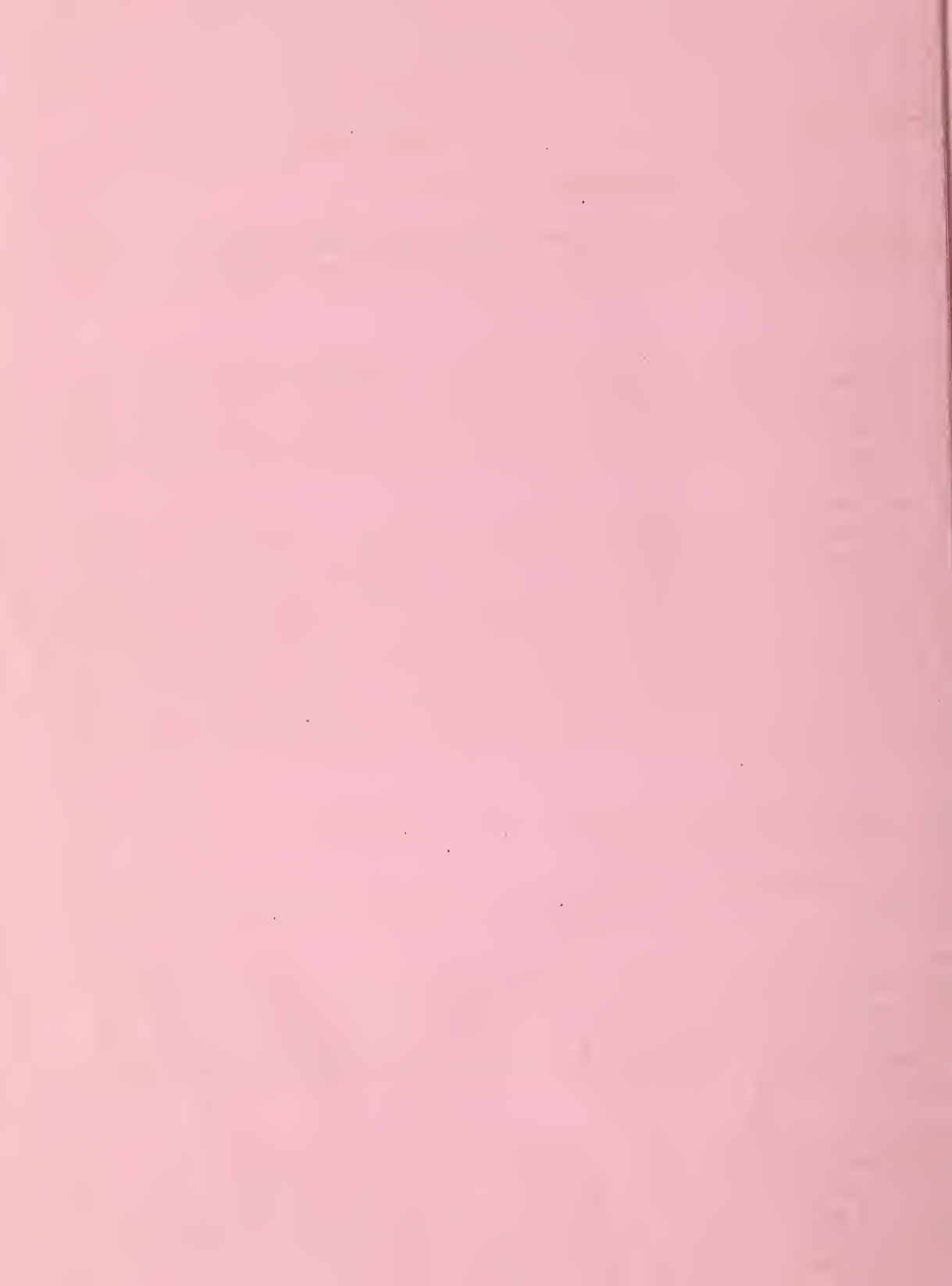
If you know beans, you know why they are bargains. You know why beans, peas and other members of the legume family were old-time stand-bys for thrifty meals, and why modern nutritionists in planning economy diets suggest beans in the menu as often as 2 to 4 times a week. You know that beans give many different food values for little money. They are energy food, and building food, and have some protective value as well. Most vegetables contain very little protein. But beans are rich in protein, although not the quality of the protein in milk, eggs and meat. Then, beans contain both carbohydrate and some fat, so they are good energy food. They also contain protective minerals -- iron, calcium, and phosphorus, and they rate for vitamin B. Finally, beans have bulk -- "stick to the ribs", as the old phrase is.

Dried beans have convenience value, too. They're easy to keep, easy to store, lots of value in a small space.

So much for the virtues of the bean. Now about varieties and favorite ways to use them.

Among the good bean buys this year is that familiar variety, the navy bean or pea bean. This small white bean is probably the kind most often used for Boston baked beans. If ever there was an authentic American dish with the tradition of our forefathers behind it, it is a brown earthenware baking pot of slow-baked beans seasoned with salt pork, molasses and mustard, and served with round slices of hot steamed brown bread.

Speaking of traditional American dishes, the South has one to compete with the famous New England baked bean. This is a dish known as "hoppin' John". And the bean that is the making of hopping John is the little blackeyed bean, called blackeyed pea, or often cowpea. Hopping John is a combination of blackeyed peas boiled slowly for hours with salt pork and combined with hot boiled rice. By the way, did you ever hear that if you eat blackeyed peas on New Year's Day, you'll have a prosperous year? You did, if you hail from Dixie.



Another familiar dried bean somewhat larger than either the navy bean or the blackeyed pea is the "Great Northern" or white bean. This variety does not can as successfully as the navy bean, because it becomes mushy. But it is excellent for home use and an especially good soup-maker. And bean soup, listeners -- bean soup, of course, is another dish that has warmed, nourished, and cheered good Americans from pioneer days to the present. For real old-fashioned American bean soup, you cook soaked dried beans in water with salt pork, onion and celery. When the beans are soft, you mash them slightly, or press them through a sieve if you don't like the skins. Add salt and pepper. Cook a few minutes until smooth and hot. A slice of lemon floating on top of a bowl of bean soup adds a pleasant tart flavor.

Well, this is white bean soup. But you make black bean soup by exactly the same method, only you use black beans.

The largest of our dried white beans are lima or butter beans. The story goes that early in the last century a captain in the navy brought back some of these beans from the city of Lima in Peru. He planted them on his New York State farm and presently limas were being cultivated widely in our eastern States. Now California is the largest single producer.

Dried lima beans, soaked overnight and cooked in lightly salted water until tender but not broken, are good seasoned with just butter. But the more typical American dish is lima beans in tomato sauce. The foods people at the Bureau of Home Economics who have tested methods of preparing beans suggest making this popular dish with a variety of seasoning. They brown a sliced onion in bacon fat, then stir in a little flour, then add canned tomatoes that have simmered a few minutes with whole cloves to make a well-seasoned tomato sauce. Into the sauce they put the cooked lima beans and season with salt and tabasco sauce. They serve the combination with strips of crisp bacon over the top.

Among the more colorful buys in dried beans are the pinto beans -- little pinkish cream-color beans mottled with brown. These small pink beans came originally from South America and Mexico and the Mexicans of the Southwest prefer them still to any kind of white bean. Some canners nowadays are using them in chili con carne mixtures. But they aren't the true chile bean, the authentic frijole (free-hole-ee) for this hot and spicy dish. The red kidney bean takes the honors for this place.

Well, these are some of the more familiar dried beans that are good bargains these days and go into many favorite American dishes. But whatever kind you choose and whatever dish you make, here are some points the foods people report for success in using dried beans. They find that all dried beans need washing first and then an overnight soak in water to cover. They say you can hasten the soaking process by using very warm water. You can use the soaking water for cooking or not as you please. If you use fresh water for cooking, the beans will be lighter in color and less strong in taste. They also report that dried beans do best on long slow cooking. And they say that almost any dried beans can take plenty of seasoning. Favorite American seasonings for beans include onion, celery, molasses, salt pork, bacon or butter, tomato sauce, and such spices as chili pepper, mustard, tabasco sauce, and cloves.

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